Shared devices in European Art

Studies 2012-2015

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AS FIGURAS DOS PESCOÇOS COMPRIDOS

—

THE FIGURES OF THE LONG NECKS

Sandro Botticelli
Vénus e Marte
Venus and Mars

Rafael (Raphael) Sanzio
Vision of a Knight
O Sonho do Cavaleiro

Durante os séculos XV e XVI, diversos artistas constantemente adaptaram e desenvolveram as obras uns dos outros, diversificando métodos e soluções para incluir e sobrepor narrativas.

Estes expedientes constituíam demonstrações de genialidade entre os humanistas, sendo também formas de expressar críticas acerca dos poderes institucionais, especialmente a Igreja.

Contextualizando o método, pode ser apresentado como exemplo a obra *Vénus e Marte*, de Sandro Botticelli, pintura mais tarde adaptada por Michelangelo no tecto da Capela Sistina, bem como por Rafael no seu *Sonho do Cavaleiro* (Londres).

Todos estes trabalhos têm diferentes camadas de significado, convergindo no dilema de Cristo, pendendo entre os Seus amores terrenos e o Seu dever, o qual Ele acabará por abraçar.

—

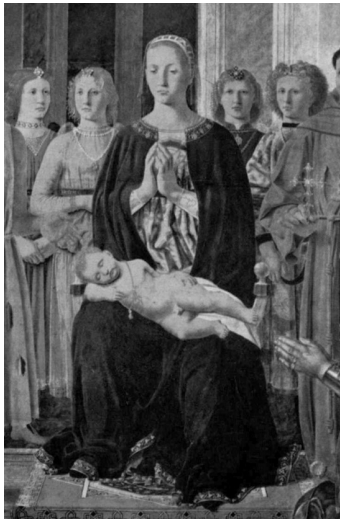
During the 15-16th centuries, several artists constantly adapted and developed each other's works, diversifying methods and solutions to include and superimpose narratives.

These devices constituted demonstrations of geniality among the humanists, being also ways to express criticisms regarding the institutional powers, especially the Church.

Contextualizing the method, it can be presented as an example the work *Venus and Mars*, by Sandro Botticelli, painting which was later adapted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, as well by Raphael in the *Vision of a Knight* (London).

All of these paintings have different layers of meaning, converging in the dilemma of Christ, dithering between His earthly love and His duty, which He will eventually embrace.

Parmigianinio
A Virgem do pescoço comprido
The Madonna of the long neck



Piero della Francesca
O Retábulo Montefeltro
The Montefeltro Altarpiece
(det.)

Giovanni Bellini
A Virgem do Prado
The Madonna of the Meadow

Outro caso interessante é a pintura usualmente conhecida por *Virgem do pescoço comprido* (Florença), por Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola).

Esta obra combina pinturas anteriores, as quais por seu lado eram já fusões de trabalhos ainda mais antigos.

Assim, do *Retábulo Montefeltro* (por Piero della Francesca, Milão), Parmigianino adaptou a combinação do nascimento de Cristo com a Sua própria morte (Pietà), simbolizando a ressurreição. Também a *Virgem do Prado* (Londres), por Giovanni Bellini, segue o mesmo conceito.

De facto esta ideia é ainda mais clara na *Virgem do pescoço comprido* de Parmigianino, porque o bebé Cristo é invulgarmente desenvolvido e apresenta uma postura crucificada.

—

Another interesting case is the painting usually known as the *Madonna with the long neck* (Florence), by Parmigianino (Girolamo Francesco Maria Mazzola).

This painting combines previous works, which in turn were already fusions of even older pictures.

So, from the *Montefeltro Altarpiece* (by Piero della Francesca, Milan) Parmigianino adapted the merging of Christ's birth with His own death (Pietà) symbolizing the resurrection. Also the *Madonna of the Meadow* (London), by Giovanni Bellini, follows the same concept.

In fact, this idea is even clearer in Parmigianino's *Madonna with the long neck*, because the baby Christ is uncommonly grown and presents a crucified posture.

Quanto à imagem da Virgem, este mesmo esquema simbólico dá substância a uma observação pertinente apresentada por Gombrich e outros autores, nomeadamente acerca do facto do seu estranho pescoço comprido de algum modo se parecer quase com o de um cisne.

Na verdade, esta semelhança parece ter sido intencional, pois o cisne era conhecido pela sua beleza e pelo seu gracioso canto de morte, sendo associado a Cristo e ao Seu trágico destino.

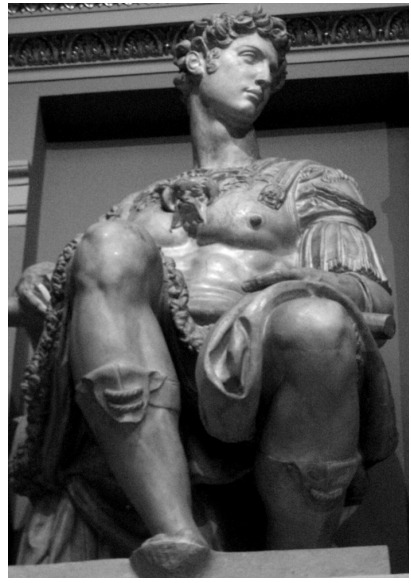
Para além disso, isto parece também explicar as características da estátua alegórica do Medici Giuliano duque de Nemours, sepultado num túmulo esculpido por Michelangelo na Capela dos Medici (Florença), tal como o de Lorenzo de' Medici duque de Urbino.

—

As to the image of the Virgin, that same symbolic device gives substance to a pertinent remark by Gombrich and other authors, namely about the fact that her strange long neck somehow almost resembles the neck of a swan.

Actually this similarity seems to have been intentional, because the swan was known by its beauty and by its graceful death song, being associated with Christ and His tragic destiny.

Furthermore, this also seems to explain the features of the allegorical statue of the Medici Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, buried in a tomb carved by Michelangelo in the Medici Chapel (Florence), like the tomb of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino.



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Estátua alegórica de Giuliano de'Medici (Duque de Nemours)
Allegorical statue of Giuliano de' Medici (Duke of Nemours)

Michelangelo não teve oportunidade de concluir toda a encomenda, que incluía também os túmulos de Lorenzo o Magnífico e do seu irmão assassinado, Giuliano.

Não obstante, considerando o contexto histórico e a lógica artística seguida por Michelangelo, é virtualmente impossível que os túmulos executados não evoquem também os Medici maiores.

Portanto, certamente que a estátua de Lorenzo duque de Urbino também homenageia Lorenzo o Magnífico, enquanto a representação de Giuliano duque de Nemours (com um pescoço comprido) homenageia em adição o "mártir" (cisne) Giuliano de' Medici, assassinado em 1478, apenas um ano antes do nascimento de Giuliano duque de Nemours, baptizado em honra do seu familiar.

—

Michelangelo didn't have the chance to complete the commission, which included the tombs of Lorenzo the Magnificent and of his murdered brother Giuliano.

However, considering the historical context and the artistic concept followed by Michelangelo, it is virtually impossible that the executed tombs didn't evoke also the major Medici.

So, surely that the statue of Lorenzo Duke of Urbino also honours Lorenzo the Magnificent, while the representation of Giuliano Duke of Nemours (with the long neck) honours in addition the "martyr" (swan) Giuliano de' Medici, assassinated in 1478, just a year before the birth of Giuliano Duke of Nemours, named after his relative.

Mas o uso simbólico do pescoço comprido tem um ilustre antecedente, em concreto o *Nascimento de Vénus* (Florença), de Sandro Botticelli, muito provavelmente a fonte de inspiração quer para Michelangelo, quer para Parmigianino.

Nesta pintura, a deusa pagã Vénus está prestes a ser coberta por uma figura feminina que também é um anjo cristão (daí o seu característico andar, uma especificidade angélica nos trabalhos de Botticelli).

À esquerda, os ventos que trouxeram a deusa para a costa representam agora os instintos naturais humanos, tentando afastar com o sopro o manto (a moral cristã).

Deste modo, está aqui representada uma tensão entre dois estados de alma, mas também uma transição que acabará por ocorrer, e a qual é simbolizada pela concha, um símbolo complexo que também representa o baptismo.

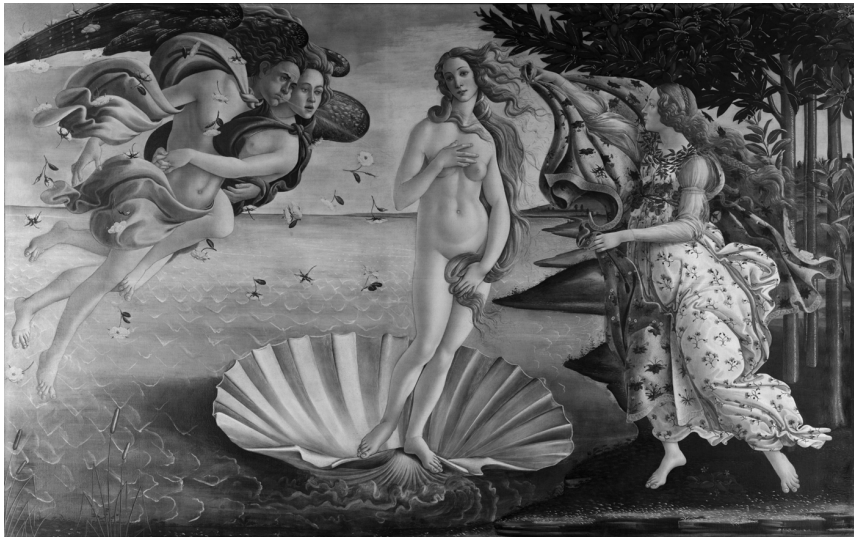
—

But the symbolic use of the long neck had an illustrious antecedent, namely the Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Florence), most likely the source of inspiration for both Michelangelo and Parmigianino.

In this painting, the pagan goddess Venus is about to be covered by a feminine figure, who is also a Christian angel (reason for her characteristic walk, which is a typical angelic feature in Botticelli's pictures).

On the left, the winds that have brought the goddess to the shore represent now the natural human instincts, trying to blow away the cloak (the Christian moral).

Thus, there is depicted a tension between two states of mind, but also a transition that eventually will occur, and which is symbolized by the shell, a complex symbol that also represents the baptism.



Sandro Botticelli
O Nascimento de Vénus
The Birth of Venus

O mesmo princípio pode ser visto na *Ninfa Galateia* (Roma), de Rafael, onde numa das camadas está representada uma tensão entre os *putti* (simbolizando anjos cristãos e a Santíssima Trindade), e as figuras que representam os instintos naturais.

Neste contexto, entre outros assuntos, o *Nascimento de Vénus* ilustra a dualidade de Cristo (um tema surpreendentemente comum naquele tempo).

O baptismo (tal como a ressurreição) era considerado um segundo "nascimento", ou por outras palavras, a transição para um novo nível, simbolizado pela segura e paradisíaca margem, a qual por seu lado é também uma alegoria das costas do próspero Estado de Florença.

—

The same principle can be seen in Raphael's *Nymph Galatea* (Rome), where in one of its layers there is depicted a tension between the *putti* (symbolizing Christian angels and the Holy Trinity), and the figures which represent the natural impulses.

In this context, among other issues, the *Birth of Venus* represents the duality of Christ (a surprisingly common subject at that time).

The baptism (like the resurrection) is considered a new birth, or in other words, a transition to a new level, symbolized by the safe and heavenly shore, which in turn is also an allegory for the coast of the prosperous Florentine State.

Cristo é na verdade uma figura dominante nesta pintura. Primeiramente, através do baptismo e após alguma hesitação, ele acabará por escolher a Sua missão sacrificial em vez dos seus amores terrenos (Madalena), tal como um soldado que decide ir para a guerra (o assunto do mencionado *Sonho do Cavaleiro*, de Rafael).

Por outro lado, depois de cumprir o Seu trágico dever e destino, o martirizado Cristo deixa definitivamente a Sua dimensão humana e regressa ao Paraíso (distinguido por laranjeiras), sendo recebido por um anjo.

De facto, nesta obra, "Vénus" também representa Cristo, do mesmo modo que, em *Palas e o Centauro* (Florença), a poderosa deusa simboliza Lorenzo o Magnífico, avisando o seu primo Lorenzo Pierfrancesco, tido como arrogante e desafiador (esta pintura fora oferecida a Pierfrancesco como uma "prenda" de casamento).

—

Christ is in fact a dominant figure in this painting. Firstly, through baptism and after some hesitation, He eventually will chose His sacrificial mission over His earthly love (Magdalene), like a warrior who decides to go to a war (the subject of the mentioned Raphael's painting).

On the other hand, after fulfilling His tragic duty and destiny, the martyred Christ leaves definitively His Human dimension and returns to Paradise (distinguished by orange trees), being received by an angel.

Indeed, in this painting, "Venus" also represents Christ, in the same way that, in Botticelli's *Pallas and the Centaur* (Florence), the powerful goddess symbolizes Lorenzo the Magnificent, warning his cousin Lorenzo Pierfrancesco, considered arrogant and insolent (this painting was offered to Pierfrancesco as a wedding "gift").

Para mais, no *Nascimento de Vénus*, a presença de Cristo é também expressa até mesmo pelas ondas, que forma escamas, pois o peixe era um dos símbolos mais antigos do Messias.

Por exemplo, o mesmo elemento pode ser encontrado nas mangas de Flora (Semiramide Apiano), em a *Primavera* de Botticelli, ou nos sarcófagos de Lorenzo duque de Urbino e de Giuliano duque de Nemours, por Michelangelo (Florença).

Na verdade, a maioria dos supostos temas mitológicos são artifícios para expressar e desenvolver assuntos cristãos.

Em conclusão, deve ser notado que os mencionados trabalhos apresentam outras camadas de significado, reflectindo a versatilidade do conceito seguido por aqueles pintores e escultores, dedicados a criar desafiadoras obras-primas, de arte e de intelecto.

—

Furthermore, in the *Birth of Venus*, the presence of Christ is also expressed even by the peculiar waves, which actually form scales, for the fish was one of the most ancient symbols of the Messiah.

For instance, this same element can be found in the sleeves of Flora (Semiramide Appiano), in Botticelli's Primavera, or in the sarcophaguses of Lorenzo Duke of Urbino and Giuliano Duke of Nemours, by Michelangelo (Florence).

In fact, the majority of the supposed mythological themes are devices to express and develop Christian issues.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the aforementioned works have other layers of meaning, reflecting the versatility of the concept followed by those painters and sculptors, dedicated to create challenging masterpieces of art and intellect.

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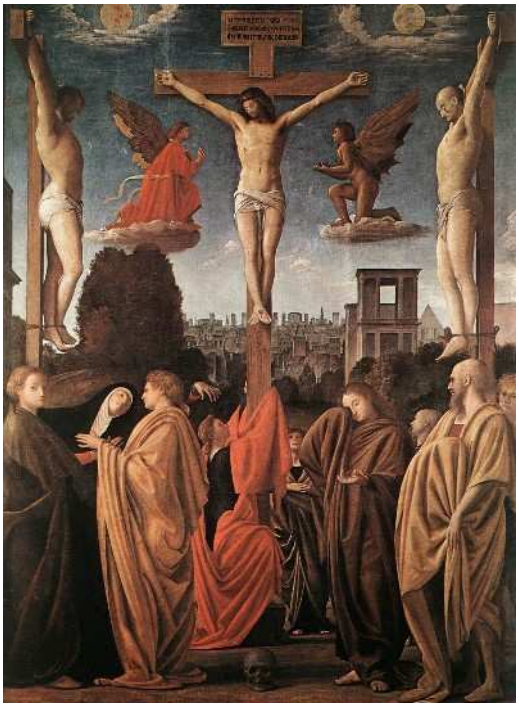
The dual Jesus and the criminals

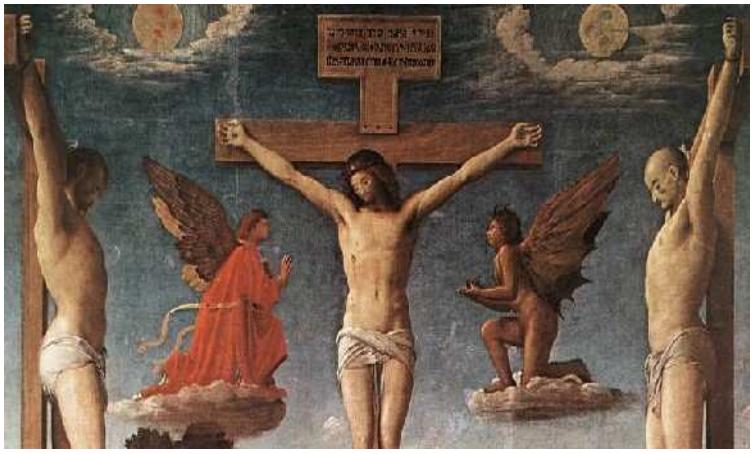
Paulo Martins Oliveira

The humanist thinkers of the Renaissance became almost obsessed with the human dimension and the struggle of conscience of Jesus[1].
In this context, various artists developed several devices to address this sensitive issue, including the adaptation of the two criminals crucified next to Christ, who in the last moments asked in desperation, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46).

Examples

• Bramantino
The Crucifixion



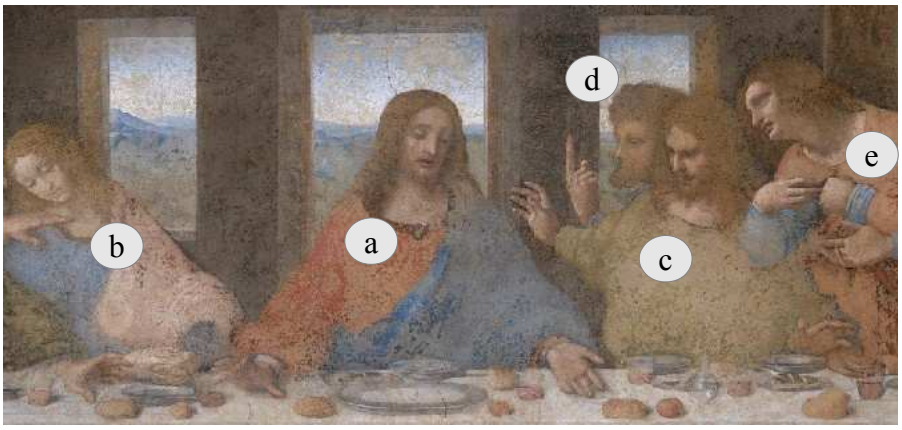


(det.)

Bramantino painted a Crucifixion in which both the positive and negative spirits of the criminals are directed towards Christ, in order to express the duality of the Messiah.

1 A telling example can be found in the *Praise of Folly* (Erasmus): "And Christ himself, that he might the better relieve this folly, being the wisdom of the father, yet in some manner became a fool when taking upon him the nature of man, he was found in shape as a man".

• Leonardo da Vinci
The Last Supper



(det.)

By embracing his higher mission, Christ (a) departs towards death.

The figure of John (b) is actually a typical composite character[2], which also represents the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, i.e. the three main characters who Jesus left when dying on the cross.

Thus, naturally on the other side, James the Greater (c) represents the crucified Christ, flanked by the bad thief (d) and the repentant one (e).

This idea of transition culminates on the opposite wall, more specifically in the Crucifixion painted by Montorfano[3].

Donato Montorfano
The Crucifixion

2 Such combinations were relatively common among several artists (see the studies mentioned in the footnotes of this contribution).

3 For more on this issue see the book *Leonardo x Michelangelo* (2012), pp.33-70, as well as the paper titled "Leonardo's Last Supper and the three layers" (published autonomously and collected in *The Akenpapers 1*).

Comparative examples

a) Jheronimus Bosch (cop.)
The Marriage Feast at Cana (det.)

On the left: John, Magdalene and the Virgin (individualized).
On the right: Christ is separated and surreptitiously flanked by the two criminals (the "bad thief" is Engelbert II of Nassau).

b) Matthias Grünewald
The Crucifixion

On the left: John, the Virgin and Magdalene, representing the emotional/earthly ties of Jesus.
On the right: John the Baptist, representing the higher mission of the Messiah.
In this painting, Christ's duality is mainly symbolized by the twisting of the cross[4].

4 On this *Crucifixion*, see the paper "O engenho de Matthias Grünewald" (published autonomously and collected in *Separata 3*).

• Caravaggio
The Supper at Emmaus

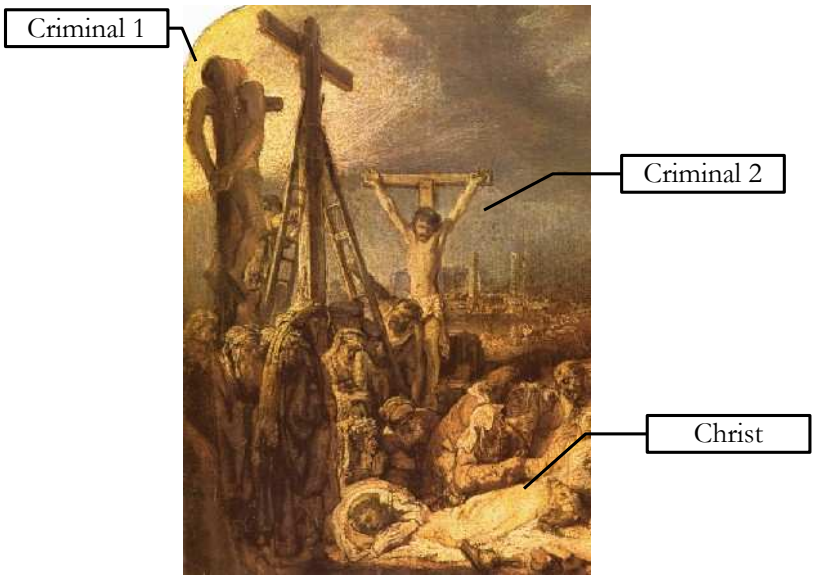
In Caravaggio's *The Supper at Emmaus*, Christ is allegorically flanked by the two criminals: the repentant one is "crucified" as Christ was, whereas the bad thief is "crucified" with his arms behind the cross-beam, in a common variation of the crucifixion of the criminals[5].

5 For further information about this artwork, see chapters "Caravaggio and the Ultimate Supper", and "The waiter and the three giants", in *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.181-199.

Comparative examples

a) Donato Montorfano
The Crucifixion (det.)

b) Rembrandt
The Lamentation



• Other encoded versions (examples)

by Botticelli

by Raphael[6]

by Michelangelo

by Caravaggio[7]

2013

6 See "The figures of the long necks", in *Separata 1*.
7 See the paper titled "The Passion of Caravaggio".

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The Deceptive Angels

Paulo Martins Oliveira

"And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light"

2 Corinthians 11:14

In order to encode surreptitious messages and criticisms in artworks, various painters used different kinds of devices, including the concealment of devilish creatures in their compositions.

Thus, several pictures are actually elegant pieces of symbolic engineering, sometimes meaning the exact opposite of the official interpretation.

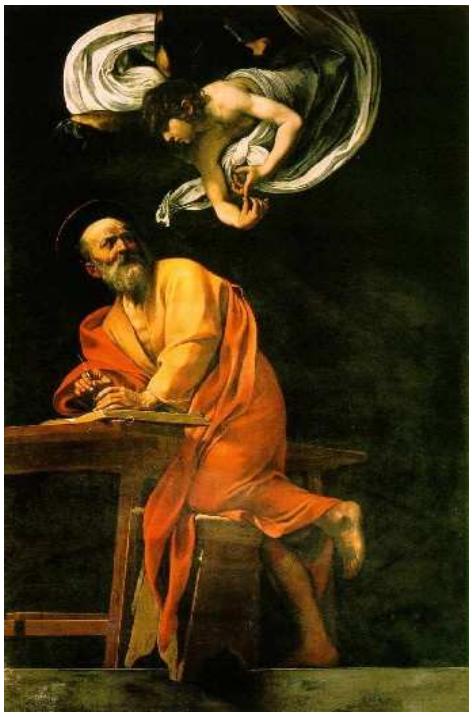
A simple example can be found in *Philip II offering Fernando to Victory*, painted by Titian (1572-75).

This picture was commissioned by the powerful Spanish king to celebrate both the birth of his new heir, and the victory of the Battle of Lepanto.

Thus, the winged figure is simultaneously the personification of Victory (following the mythological tradition (e.g. the Victory of Samothrace), and also a God's angel, to whom Philip trusts his son Fernando.

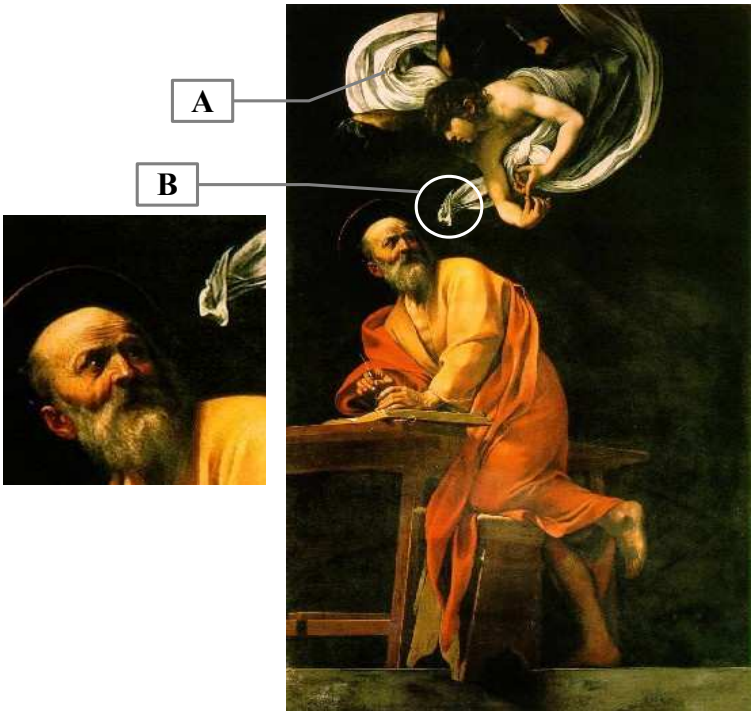
However, this winged being presents ambiguous monstrous features, indicative of the true opinion of Titian about his ultra-Catholic commissioner, who naively relies on that disguised devilish angel.

Another example can be found in Caravaggio's *The Inspiration of St. Matthew* (1602).



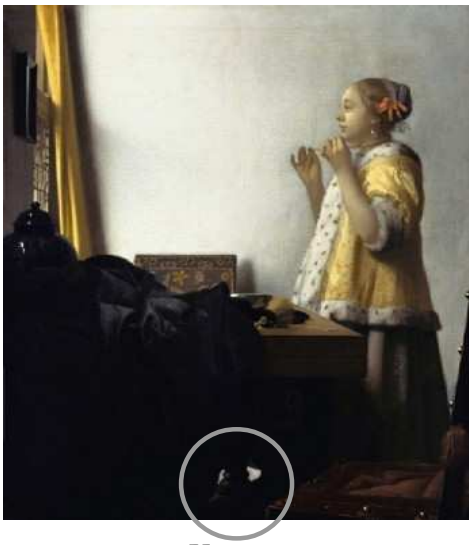
In a superficial layer of meaning, the painter depicted a God's messenger guiding the writings of the Evangelist.

However, it is actually a false angel, sent by the Devil to deceive St. Matthew. Therefore, the angel's mantle forms the "Devil's eye" (A), and also a small demon (B) trying to mislead the Saint.



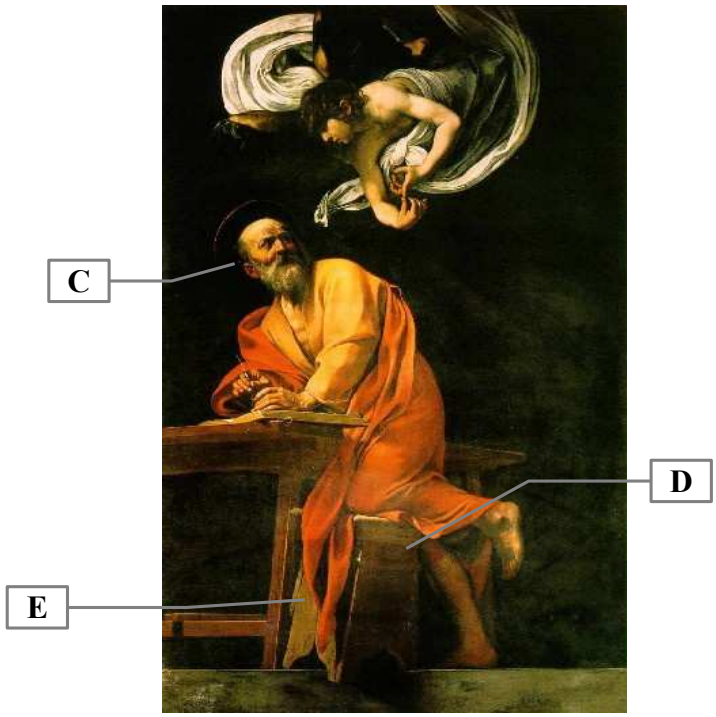
Other examples of the Devil's eye:

Vasco Fernandes
St. Peter



Vermeer
Woman with a pearl necklace

On the other hand, the hesitation of St. Matthew is symbolized by his doubtful expression (C), and especially by the wobbly stool (D), which represents the fallibility of all men, including the most holy ones.



In an even deeper level of meaning, this painting expresses the skepticism and doubts of several freethinkers, who pondered that the Gospels may not be free from errors and omissions.

Indeed, in Caravaggio's narrative, St. Matthew will fall into deception, which is symbolized by a monstrous head looking down (E).

In conclusion, the Art of that period is not univocal, even when commissioned by kings and high clergymen.

2013

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A MITOLOGIA CRISTIANIZADA

—

THE CHRISTIANIZED MYTHOLOGY

§ O sistema artístico baseado em ambiguidades e múltiplos significados não morreu com Michelangelo Buonarroti, tendo continuado a progredir durante as últimas décadas do século XVI e as primeiras do XVII, especialmente através de alguns artistas italianos, mas também flamengos e neerlandeses.

De facto, no Norte da Europa estes novos pintores desenvolveram a antiga tradição herdada de mestres como Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Jheronimus Bosch ou Pieter Bruegel, mas agora acrescida de frequentes referências classicistas, que entretanto chegavam de Itália, sendo mescladas com temas cristãos.

Deste modo, em vários casos os trabalhos não devem ser divididos entre temas religiosos e mitológicos, pois os dois estão sobrepostos nas mesmas obras.

—

§ The artistic system based on ambiguities and multiple meanings did not died with Michelangelo Buonarroti. It continued to evolve during the last decades of the 16th century and the first of the 17th, especially through some Italian artists, but also Flemish and Dutch.

Indeed, in the Northern Europe these new painters continued to develop the old tradition inherited from masters such as Jan van Eyck, Rogier van der Weyden, Jheronimus Bosch or Pieter Bruegel, although now including frequent classical references, which in the meantime came from Italy, being merged with Christian themes.

Actually, in several cases the works shouldn't de divided between religious and mythological subjects, as the two are superimposed on the same pictures.

Peter Paul Rubens (oficina/workshop)
Júpiter e Mercúrio visitando Filémon e Baucis
Jupiter and Mercury visiting Philemon and Baucis

Tal pode ser observado, por exemplo, numa pintura da oficina do pintor flamengo Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), obra essa intitulada *Júpiter e Mercúrio visitando Filémon e Baucis* (Viena), e que representa o acolhimento temporário que o casal de humanos ofereceu aos dois deuses.

Contudo, um olhar mais próximo revela uma versão cristã, na qual Júpiter é Deus Pai, enquanto Mercúrio (o tradicional mensageiro) é Cristo. Por seu turno, a lanterna com as chamas simboliza a pomba e as línguas de fogo do Espírito Santo[46].

Na primeira linha, hierarquicamente abaixo, Filémon e Baucis representam Adão e Eva, ou seja, a Humanidade em geral (Gn.5:2).

Tendo sido criado à imagem de Deus, "Adão" é parcialmente uma versão rejuvenescida do suposto "Júpiter", o qual partilha feições também com "Mercúrio".

—

This can be seen, for instance, in a painting from the workshop of the Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), entitled *Jupiter and Mercury visiting Philemon and Baucis* (Vienna), which represents the temporary accommodation of the two gods by the couple of humans.

However, a closer look reveals a veiled Christian version, in which Jupiter is God Father, while Mercury (the traditional emissary) is Christ. By its turn, the lamp with the flames symbolizes the dove and the tongues of fire of the Holy Spirit[46].

In the foreground, hierarchically below, Philemon and Baucis represent Adam and Eve, that is, Mankind in general (Gn.5:2).

Having been created at the image of God, "Adam" is partially a rejuvenated version of the supposed "Jupiter", who shares features also with "Mercury".

Quanto a Eva, ela agarra um ganso, que além de lembrar um cisne (um dos símbolos de Cristo), é também um equivalente pagão do cordeiro sacrificial, ou por outras palavras, do Cristo morto pelos homens.

Na essência, esta pintura sumariza obras como o grande *Retábulo de Gand*, do século XV. Neste trabalho de Van Eyck, Deus Pai está no nível superior, combinado com o Seu Filho no mesmo trono (Ap. 22:1).

Em baixo, um realçado cordeiro constitui um símbolo de Cristo (uma vez que a Sua forma humanizada já está representada e fundida em cima).

Neste retábulo também Adão e Eva são enfatizados, representando a Humanidade[47].

—

As for "Eve", she grabs a goose, which besides being somehow similar to a swan (one of Christ's symbols), is as well a pagan equivalent to the sacrificial lamb, or in other words, to the Christ killed by men.

In essence, this painting summarizes artworks like the large *Gand Altarpiece* of the 15th century. In this Van Eyck's work, God Father is in the upper level, combined with His Son in the same throne (Rev.22:1).

Below, an enhanced lamb constitutes a symbol of Christ (since His humanized form is already depicted and merged above).

In this altarpiece also Adam and Eve are emphasized, representing Mankind[47].

Seguindo o modelo tradicional, Eva segura o fruto proibido, o qual sublinha a sua culpa, e esta mesma ideia é expressa no trabalho da oficina de Rubens, mas aqui através do ganso, que representa também o pecado original. De facto, "Eva" (Baucis) empurra a ave para "Adão".

Por este motivo, "Eva" está simbolicamente envelhecida, seguindo uma solução previamente desenvolvida por Michelangelo na sexta secção do tecto da Capela Sistina, onde Eva (em particular) envelhece imediatamente após ter cometido o pecado original.

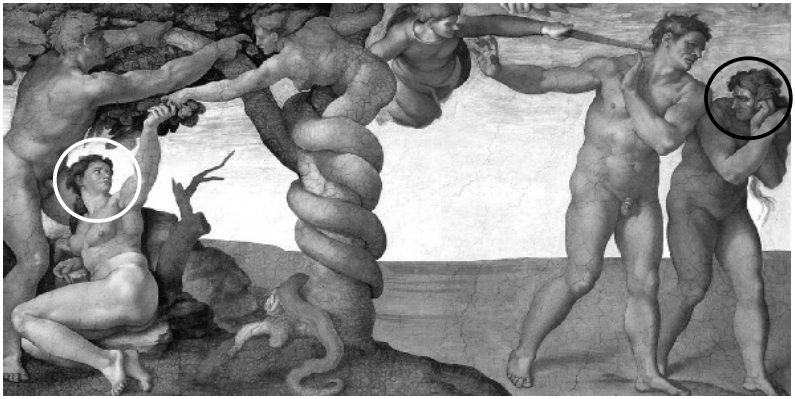
Isto reflecte a dominante teologia neo-platónica, a qual sustenta que todas as coisas e pessoas se tornam gradualmente mais "corruptas" à medida que se distanciam de Deus.

—

Following the traditional model, Eve holds the forbidden fruit, which underlines her guilt, and this same idea is expressed in the picture from Rubens' workshop, but here through the goose, which also represents the original sin. Actually, "Eve" (Baucis) pushes the bird towards "Adam".

For this same reason, Eve is symbolically aged, according to a solution previously developed by Michelangelo in the sixth section of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, where Eve (in particular) immediately grows old after having committed the original sin.

This reflects the dominant neo-platonic theology, which states that all things and persons become gradually more degenerated as they distance themselves from God.



Michelangelo Buonarroti
Tecto da Capela Sistina
Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
(dets.)

Neste ponto, Michelangelo expressa com grande originalidade as doutrinas oficiais, nomeadamente através de técnicas de envelhecimento.

Na quinta cena, onde Deus cria Eva a partir de Adão, o próprio Deus surge até enfraquecido e mais velho, significando que a mulher é uma criação menos importante (e distante).

Expressando um conceito similar, esta é a razão pela qual "Baucis" está consideravelmente envelhecida no quadro flamengo.

Quanto a "Mercúrio", ele segura um copo de vinho, simbolizando a sua identidade encoberta enquanto Jesus Cristo. Contudo, o vinho não é vermelho-sangue, mas branco, tratando-se de um artifício que mantém o exercício menos óbvio.

Também com um subtil significado cristão, existe pão na mesa, e ainda um cesto onde se destaca a combinação entre uvas (dimensão divina) e maçãs (dimensão falível).

—

In this point Michelangelo expresses with great originality the official doctrines, namely through ageing procedures.

In the fifth scene, where God creates Eve from Adam, God Himself even appears weakened and older, meaning that the woman is a less important (and distant) creation.

Expressing a similar concept, this is why "Baucis" is considerably aged in the Flemish picture.

As to "Mercury", he holds a glass of wine, symbolizing his veiled identity as Jesus Christ. However the wine is not blood red but white, being a device that keeps the exercise less obvious.

Also with a subtle Christian meaning, there is bread on the table, and also a basket in which stands out the combination between the grapes (the divine dimension) and the apples (the fallible dimension).

Como pode ser visto, na essência este é um trabalho cristão, e outras pinturas supostamente profanas são na verdade obras-primas teológicas.

Mas tal como na região neerlandesa, também em Itália existiram desenvolvimentos quanto ao uso de múltiplos significados, sobretudo pela iniciativa de um pintor chamado Michelangelo Merisi, nascido em 1571 na localidade de Caravaggio.

—

As one can see, in its essence this is a Christian work, and other supposed mythological pictures are actually theological masterpieces.

But as in the Dutch regions, so also in Italy there were significant developments regarding the use of multiple meanings and of superimposed images, especially through the initiative of a painter called Michelangelo Merisi, born in 1571 in the village of Caravaggio.

TWO EXILED CELEBRITIES

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Abstract: Brief note on an ambiguity designed by Domenico Petarlini, in order to simultaneously evoke two personalities of the Mediterranean, united by fate.

The merging of identities into a single character is one of the various ingenious expedients developed by the old masters. Such a device was not rare and can be found in some portraits from the 15th century, as well as in other works from the following centuries.

Herein is presented a late example (19th century), which, despite some creative exhaustion, is nonetheless an interesting compromise solution, carefully designed to represent both the exiled Dante (first layer of meaning) and the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte (second layer).

Dante, by Domenico Petarlini (also Peterlini)

2014

THE MERGING OF IDENTITIES IN OLD PAINTINGS

Paulo Martins Oliveira

Abstract: besides conceiving standard realistic portraits, painters also engineered representations in which different identities were merged into single composite characters. This intellectualized expedient was actually appreciated by several commissioners, who were humanists themselves.

> Propitious deities accord her prayers:
> the mingled bodies of the pair unite
> and fashion in a single human form.
> So one might see two branches underneath
> a single rind uniting grow as one:
> so, these two bodies in a firm embrace
> no more are twain, but with a two-fold form
> nor man nor woman may be called – through both
> in seeming they are neither one of twain.
>
> Ovidius, *Metamorphoses* (IV:373)

The combination of different episodes in order to form elaborate synthesizing images is detectable in medieval art[1]. Subsequently, this ingenious artifice was largely improved from the 15th century onwards, following the development of oil painting in Flanders.

This new method allowed artists to work on facial features with much greater detail, not just to produce accurate portraits, but actually also to design allegorical depictions, either by rejuvenating or ageing individuals, and even either by merging or duplicating them, with specific symbolic goals[2].

Therefore, besides combining separate stories, artists also created ambiguous, adapted characters that suggested, for instance, the respective commissioners and patrons, in order to introduce them into much more challenging intellectual pictures, which were then particularly appreciated for their subtlety and ingenuity.

In fact, distinguishing themselves as composite artists, various painters conceived ambiguous characters, and this aspect is crucial for understanding many artworks from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries.

Resembling the typical design of literary characters (each made of different real individuals), this device can also be identified in some later works, including Petarlini's

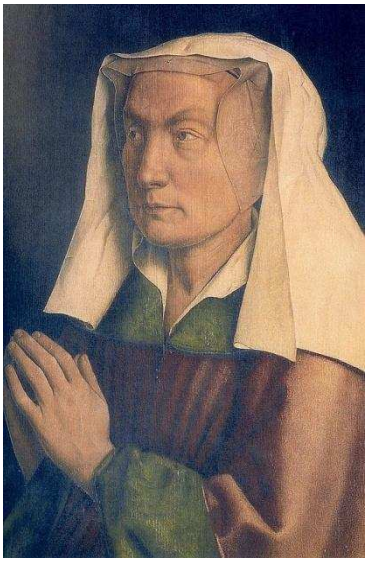
Dante (19th century), which actually features both the exiled Italian poet and the exiled Napoleon Bonaparte, as remarked elsewhere[3].

Nonetheless, such an expedient is in fact much older[4], and for instance one can consider the depictions of God's face that were elaborated in the workshop of Jan van Eyck. Those representations were actually compromise solutions, designed to solve the puzzling reference in the very last and culminating chapter of the Bible, where both God the Father and Christ are mentioned as being in the same throne (Rev.22:3).

So, in the *Fountain of Grace* (Madrid), God the Father wears his specific garments and tiara, but instead of being portrayed as the typical elderly gray man, He was rejuvenated in order to also allude to Christ, whose symbol before mankind – the lamb – is in turn individualized in front of the throne.

The same logic can be found in the famous *Ghent Altarpiece*[5], where God the Father and Christ are enthroned as one, while in the lower panel the lamb stands on an altar that also evokes a "throne".

But this same Flemish artwork hides an even more elaborate artifice, specifically on its exterior panels, where there are portraits of the donors Joos Vijd and his wife Elisabeth.



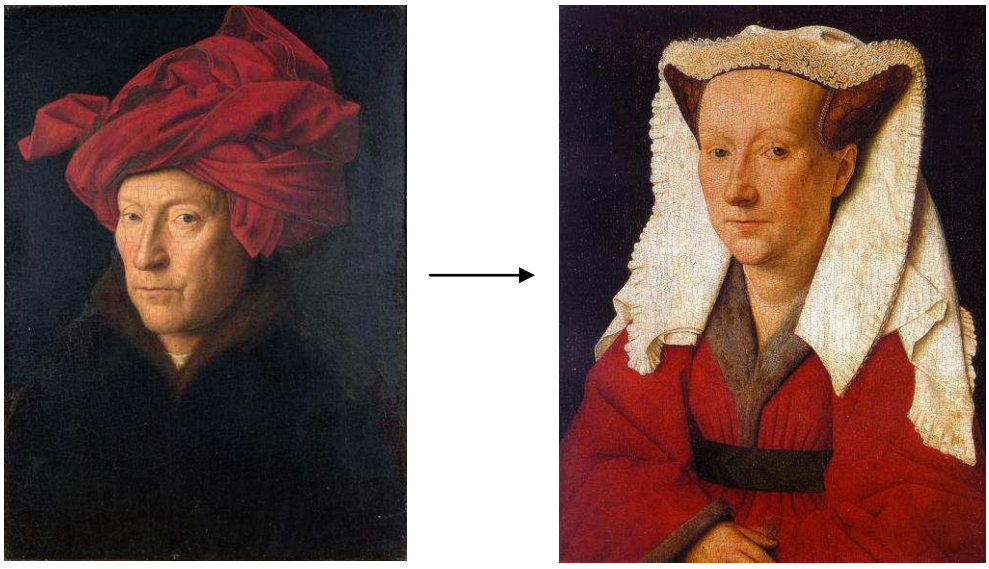
In fact, a closer look shows that the masculine features are projected on the feminine representation, which therefore is not a truly realistic portrait of Elisabeth, but rather an actually typical symbolic figuration used to encode certain issues that were particularly important at that time.

Thus, the symbolic merging of the couple into a single composite individual expresses the concept of union, visually embodying crucial biblical references[6].

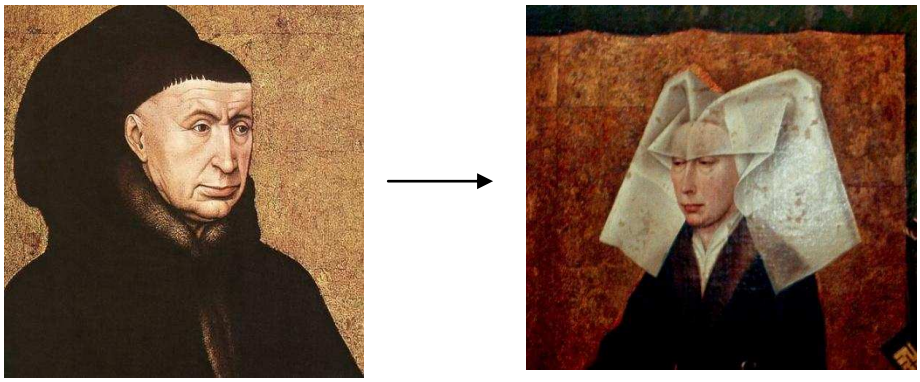
This kind of fusion gives prevalence to the masculine element (over the feminine one), and this also relates to the then popularized dualistic perspective, which advocated that in each person coexist both a masculine (celestial) and a feminine (earthly) dimension[7].

In this context, the subsidiary portrait of Joos Vijd (merged with his wife) symbolizes both the union of the couple and the duality of Joos himself. In fact, as mentioned above, commissioners with broader horizons often admitted and even appreciated these exquisite devices[8].

A similar expedient can be found when comparing the individual portraits of Jan van Eyck himself and of his wife Margaret[9].



Likewise, his distinguished colleague Rogier van der Weyden used that artifice, as seen in the depictions of Chancellor Nicolas Rolin and of his wife Guigone de Salins, portrayed on the exterior panels of the *Last Judgment* (Beaune).



Again, one can perceive a projection of the masculine features over the feminine character, contrary to the representations in the stained glass windows (Hospices of Beaune), in which the spouses are clearly differentiated.

Focusing now on the main scene of the altarpiece (central inner panel), below Christ is the prominent Archangel Michael having a face with key features that suggest and honours Duke Philip the Good (rejuvenated), who was the sovereign of the independent and prosperous Duchy of Burgundy, of which Rolin was Chancellor[10].

But, in other cases, artists have aged their merged depictions, as seen in Dürer's *St. Jerome* (Lisbon), in which the painter adapted the features of a Flemish elder in order to prepare and execute an aged self-portrait, to be offered to a friend of the German artist.

In all the examples shown, the accuracy and realism of the portraits became conditioned by symbolic goals.

Thus, the mastery of features served different purposes and devices, including the merging of characters, which actually explains works such as the so-called *Mona Lisa*[11].

But in other situations, instead of involving fusions, this kind of symbolic engineering allowed the direct "splitting" of a given individual, in order to obtain to related characters that represent the conflicting facets of a person, for instance.

The painting above (*The Fortune Teller*) shows two adapted self-portraits of Caravaggio, who was one of the greatest masters in these expedients (which often involved either rejuvenating or ageing techniques).

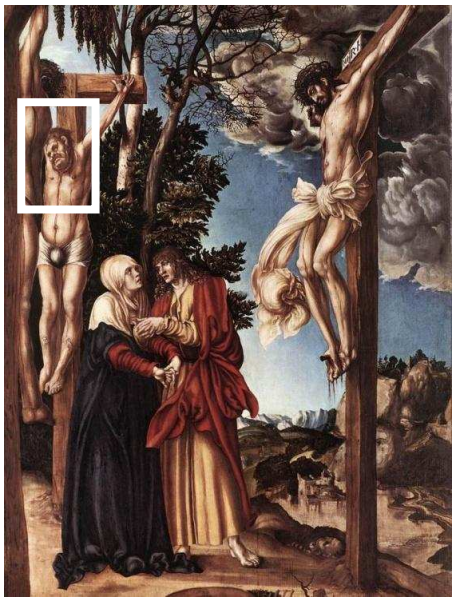
In fact, a systematic comparative analysis throughout the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries unveils dozens of symbolic self-depictions of painters, with different purposes.

One of the most common reasons was the concealment of a characteristic allegorical penitence, in which a suggestive figure (evoking the artist) suffers and pays for his sins, anticipating and somehow forestalling the punishments of Purgatory.

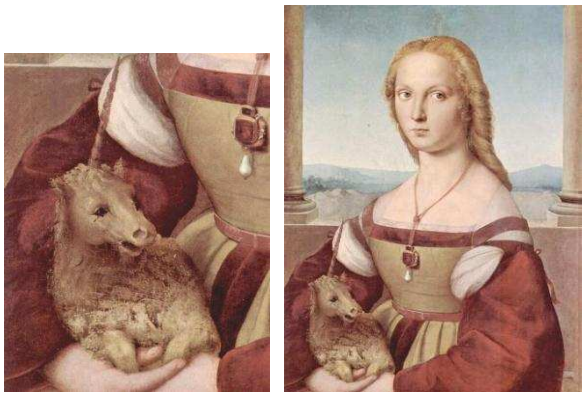
For instance, this explains in part why the famous St. Bartholomew's flayed skin in the Sistine Chapel is indeed a self-portrait of Michelangelo[12].

In this context, as demonstrated elsewhere[13], the so-called "Tree Man" of the *Garden Of Earthly Delights* (Jheronimus Bosch) materializes an eternal hangover, expressing very precise references in order to allegorize the punishment of the defiled Burgundian-Dutch elites, including the painter himself (all corrupted by the new foreign Habsburg rulers).

Among many other curious examples, it is interesting to see how Lucas Cranach crucified himself as a criminal, admitting and purging his sins for eternity[14].



Moreover, it is important to note and emphasize that these versatile devices constitute indeed an artistic principle, which can be seen also in depictions of animals, objects and even landscapes[15].



In this example – *Lady with unicorn* – the mythical animal is also a lamb (both symbols of Christ and purity).

Overall, it should be underlined that the art of the old masters is much more than "bureaucratic" depictions of Annunciations, Epiphanies or Crucifixions. Actually, these are just the official and superficial layers, which constitute the starting points for the highest expressions of human ingenuity and free-thought.

2014

Notes

[1] See *The Composite episodes in Christian Art* (online).

[2] This artifice became also adopted by artists who preferred the traditional tempera, being used as well in frescoes and even in sculptures.

[3] See the paper *Two exiled celebrities* (online).

[4] See the book titled *Os Painéis de Avis* and the paper *O mecanismo dos Painéis de Avis*, concerning the artist Nuno Gonçalves (15th century, disciple of Rogier van der Weyden).

[5] For more on this artwork, see the introductory chapters of *Jheronimus Bosch – o relojoeiro dos símbolos*, especially pp.62-64.

[6] For instance, Genesis 2:23-24; Matthew 19:5-6; Mark 10:7-8; Ephesians 5:22-23, 31.

[7] Freethinking Humanists argued that even Jesus Christ was subjected to this nature.

[8] The same outer panels of the *Ghent Altarpiece* present another subtle device, which is concealed in the symmetric connection between John the Baptist and John the Apostle. This last one is actually also a feminine version of the Baptist, in order to overlap a subsidiary couple – a reinvention of Adam and Eve (who are directly depicted on the inner panels).

[9] Moreover, this corroborates that the masculine figuration is indeed a self-portrait of the artist.

[10] About this and other specific transfigurations in the *Last Judgment* of Beaune, see the introductory chapters in *Jheronimus Bosch – o relojoeiro dos símbolos* (pp.65-68).

[11] Some aspects concerning this complex painting were already published in *The L(eonardo) and the S(alai)*, online; and in *The landscape of the Mona Lisa*, collected in *Separata 1*, 2012, pp.59-68.

[12] See the introductory part of the paper *The L(eonardo) and the S(alai)*, online.

[13] This issue is detailed in the book *Jheronimus Bosch – o relojoeiro dos símbolos* (pp.119-124). See also the paper titled *Jheronimus Bosch, the surdo canis* (online), as well as the related studies regarding the same artist.

[14] See also the infographics in a paper about his countryman Grünewald, titled *O engenho de Matthias Grünewald,* online.

[15] The book *Metamorphoses* (Ovidius) was a crucial influence on many artists, who, besides depicting those episodes, also adopted the underlying concept itself, in order to design all kinds of metamorphosed shapes, which facilitated the overlapping of different stories and issues.

THE COMPOSITE EPISODES IN CHRISTIAN ART

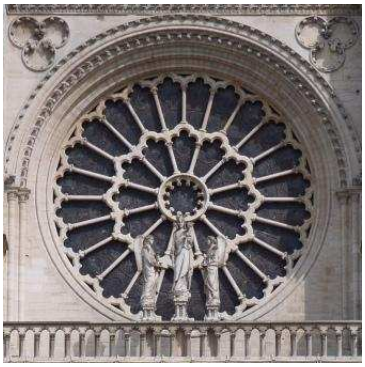
Paulo Martins Oliveira

Abstract: many of the well known religious artworks are actually elaborate compromise solutions, carefully designed to overlap different relatable episodes, which can be thus particularized.

According to principles of economy and ingenuity, medieval masters combined different issues into single images, whose meanings could be in turn unfolded for didactic purposes.

A good example can be found in Gothic cathedrals, particularly in the so-called rose windows, which present various designs in accordance with the respective combination of symbols.

Example
Notre Dame of Paris, rose window



Herein, the 24 outer sections symbolize the 24 Elders of the Apocalypse, while the 12 inner sections represent the Apostles

In addition to this visual idea of union around Christ, most of these Gothic circular windows also resemble flowers, alluding both to Paradise and to the Virgin Mary.

Denoting great plasticity, some windows even suggest a wheel, thereby incorporating the medieval Wheel of Fortune (Rota Fortunae)[1]. Moreover, this same concept of motion often expresses the "christening" of the traditional twelve signs of the Zodiac (≈ the Apostles), that is to say, the apparent movement of the heavenly sky[2].

Generally speaking, those architectural elements are characterized by their versatility, and exemplify a dynamic method that was also adopted by fellow medieval painters.

Example from the 13th century
Madonna and Christ on a curved throne (Washington DC)
Unknown artist, presumably from Constantinople

In order to celebrate the victory of eternal Christian life over earthly death, this "throne" is actually also an amphitheatre expressly designed to evoke the martyrs of early Christianity. Furthermore, this shaped feature even seems to be a free depiction of the Roman Colosseum, which is a major symbol of those persecutions. In this context, the painting probably implies a moral superiority of Constantinople over Rome, i.e. of Eastern Orthodoxy over Western Catholicism.

But the management of ambiguities and compromise solutions was also used to combine different biblical episodes, which could be unfolded.

Example from the 14th century
Fra Angelico, *The Entombment of Christ* (Paris)

Superimposed episodes: the Crucifixion; the Descent from the Cross; the Pietà; the Entombment; the Resurrection.

Other elaborate fusions simultaneously address the birth of Christ on one hand, and His death and resurrection (rebirth) on the other hand, synthesizing thus the path and the higher mission of Jesus[3]. About this direct link between the birth and resurrection see John 16:20-22.

Some examples concerning the birth-rebirth of Christ (14th, 15th and 16th centuries)

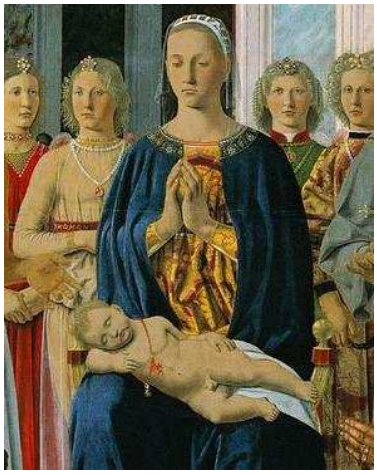
Giotto, *Epiphany* (New York)

This crib also symbolizes a sarcophagus, from which Christ will rebirth. This same picture also evokes the Pietà and the Entombment.

Giovanni Bellini, *Pietà* (Milan)

Superimposed episodes: the Descent from the Cross; the Pietà; the Entombment; the Resurrection.

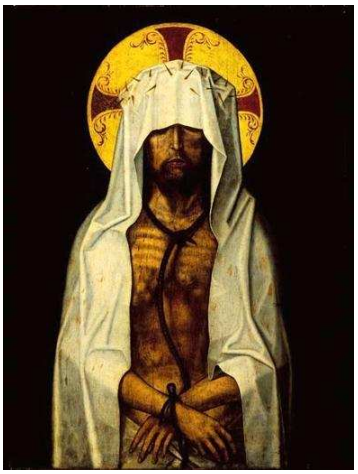
Piero della Francesca, *The Montefeltro Altarpiece*, det. (Milan)



Superimposed episodes: the Birth of Christ; the Pietà (Baby Christ is "dead"); the Resurrection (rebirth)[4].

A similar representation by Giovanni Bellini, *The Madonna of the Meadow* (London)[5]

Vicente Gil [copy, 16th century], *Ecce Homo* (Lisbon)



Superimposed episodes: Christ before the High Priest; the Ecce Homo; Christ Entombed; Christ Resurrected.

A variant by Cristóvão de Figueiredo, specifying *The Entombment*, det. (Lisbon)

Michelangelo, *The Entombment* (London)

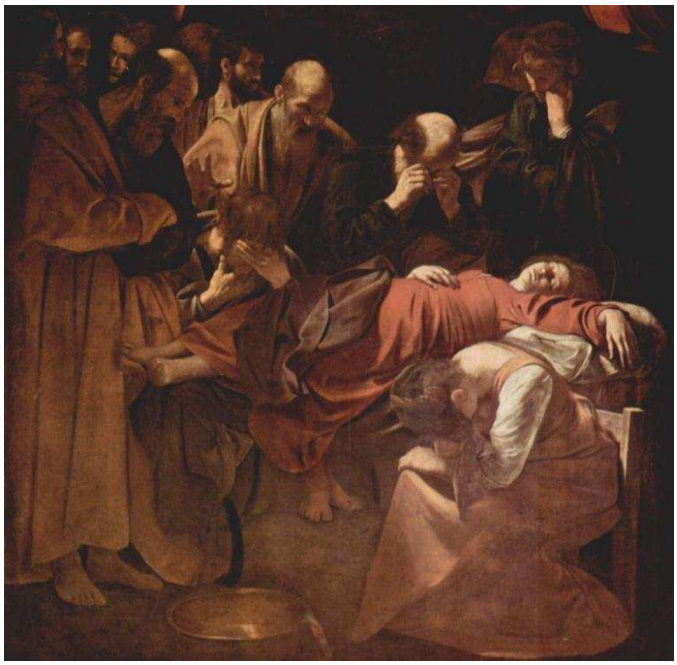
Superimposed episodes: the Descent from the Cross; the Pietà; the Entombment; the Resurrection.

Parmigianino, *Madonna with the long neck*, det. (Florence)

Superimposed episodes: the Birth of Christ; the Crucifixion; the Pietà; the Resurrection (rebirth)[6].

As presented elsewhere[7], Caravaggio (1571-1610) would be one of the greatest masters in these procedures, and the next example is just one of his simpler works.

Caravaggio, *The Death of the Virgin*, det. (Paris)



Superimposed episodes: the Death of the Virgin; the Assumption (ascension) of the Virgin, who is actually levitating.

Besides these issues, the same picture hides other important messages, which contradict the Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin herself[8].

In conclusion, historical studies must take into account the dynamic interpretation designed by artists, who were shaping ingenuity itself.

2014

Notes

[1] This complex symbol concerns the acceptance of all God's decisions, even if they seem random or unfair. Furthermore, the Wheel of Fortune was a message of hope to the unfortunate, and a warning to the rich and powerful (adapting various biblical passages, e.g. Mt.19:30, 20:16; Mk.10:31; Lk.14:11, 18:14).

[2] Some of these wheels have only eight sections, which symbolize the eight individuals saved during the Great Flood (Old Testament ≈ the 12 Apostles of the New Testament).

[3] Christmas and Eastern are still the major feasts of the Catholic calendar.

[4] For more on this picture, see the chapter titled "Basic example: The Montefeltro Altarpiece" in *Leonardo x Michelangelo* (2012).

[5] Check other aspects in the online paper *The (diabolic) oak of the Rovere Popes*, also collected in *The Akenpapers 1*, 2013, pp.67-79.

[6] On these abnormal figurations of the Virgin and Christ see the paper *The figures of the long necks*, collected in *Separata 1* (pp.45-57).

[7] See the online paper titled *The Passion of Caravaggio*, as well as the related studies by the same author on this and other artists, concerning the versatile use of fusions, duplications, ambiguities, etc.

[8] In fact, most of the freethinking artists and humanists from the 15th, 16th and 17th centuries opposed this dogma, by which the Church actually intended to emphasize the divine dimension of Christ, considering Him as the carnal son of a woman already free of sin from her own birth. On this matter see for instance the ironic remark of Erasmus in the *Praise of Folly* (original – 1509; quoted edition – 1913, Oxford), p.118: "They [the Apostles] knew the Mother of Jesus; but which of them has so Philosophically demonstrated how she was preserved from Original sin, has have done our Divines [theologians]?" See also p.83: "... but chiefly, the Virgin Mother, to whom the common people do in a manner attribute more than to the Son".

THE HIDDEN LETTERS IN OLD PAINTINGS

Paulo Martins Oliveira

When designing their artworks, several painters often shaped certain details in order to disguise letters, which had different purposes.

Examples from the 1st half of the 16th century, relating to three typologies:

1 - Identifying an allegorical character

The Temptation of St. Anthony, by Jheronymus Bosch

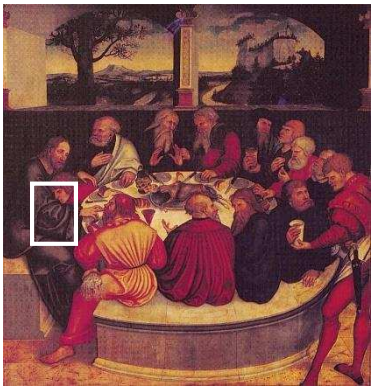
det.

The merged letters [F S] surreptitiously identify the enigmatic character (Filips de Schone)[1].

2 - Emphasizing certain qualities of a character

The Last Supper, by Lucas Cranach

det.



Herein, the combined letters [𝒶 o] allude to the quality of Christ as being the alpha and omega (Rev.22:13)[2].

3 - Signing the artwork

St. John the Baptist in the Desert, by Álvaro Pires

det.

In this case, the connected letters [A P] function as a subtle monogram of the painter[3].

As a final remark, it should be noted that the concealment of letters is just one of several devices used by artists to design the most ingenious and challenging creations.

2015

NOTES

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[1] Filips de Schone (Philip the Handsome) is accompanied by his wife Joanna the Mad and other identifiable characters (see the infographics in *Porquê 'Jheronimus' Bosch?*).

[2] This picture has other important artifices which equally express symbolic codes in use by Cranach and by fellow artists.

[3] See other examples from the same painter in *Álvaro Pires, Mestre da Lourinhã*.

O BEM E O MAL NA ARQUITECTURA GÓTICA

PAULO MARTINS OLIVEIRA

Reformulando os modelos simbólicos românicos, os novos edifícios góticos vão definir com maior nitidez o papel que o bem e o mal ocupam na arquitectura medieval.

Assim, em primeiro lugar existe uma mais clara separação conceptual, na medida em que, se os interiores românicos eram demonstrações simultâneas do Inferno e do Paraíso, já dentro dos monumentos góticos irá privilegiar-se o elemento paradisíaco.

Em todo o caso, o conceito de mesclagem irá manter-se nestes novos interiores, mas agora combinando-se o florido Éden original (alfa, Antigo Testamento) com a culminante cidade da Jerusalém Celeste (ómega, Novo Testamento).

Neste processo, as criaturas do bestiário irão ser, em geral, expurgadas para as paredes do exterior, e mesmo aí estarão esculpidas como que se projectando para fora do edifício. Em sentido contrário, as figuras santas da Igreja são absorvidas pelos muros, nomeadamente em nichos e arquivoltas.

Deste modo, é como se os templos góticos "expirassem" os maus espíritos e "inspirassem" os exemplos de referência[1].

Ao aproximarem-se de um edifício, os fiéis eram desde logo lembrados da permanente escolha entre o bem e o mal, numa luta interior que acompanha a vida de cada um.

Note-se todavia que o mal nunca é completamente eliminado, mas antes submetido, numa espécie de dieta moral onde se assume que os pecados e tentações são parte integrante da existência terrena.

[1] Sobre este assunto vejam-se os capítulos introdutórios do estudo *A Janela de Tomar*.

Do mesmo modo que ciclicamente o Carnaval dá lugar à Páscoa, assim também os fiéis deveriam procurar evoluir, pelo que a entrada no templo representa igualmente esse esforço de transição para a virtude, deixando no exterior os "demónios" subjugados.

Por seu turno, numa perspectiva mais institucional, tais criaturas diabólicas são até domesticadas e colocadas ao serviço da Igreja, bastando lembrar que, no fim dos tempos, o grande demónio não é morto, mas antes aprisionado. De facto, ele e os seus ajudantes serão necessários para punir os condenados na eterna masmorra infernal.

Isto implica até uma peculiar cooperação entre um S. Miguel vencedor e um Satanás submetido, como é visível na pintura *O Julgamento das Almas* (MNAA)[2].

De realçar ainda que o mal subjugado é também um troféu vitorioso para os que representam o bem, e isso explica por exemplo o dragão heráldico que a dinastia de Avis fez encerrar na coroa real e em elmos[3].

Esta domesticação dos símbolos do mal torna compreensível que, em sobreposição, as criaturas malignas se tornem agora em defensoras dos espaços sagrados.

Deste modo, muitos dos seres que são "expurgados" dos muros são, afinal, também protectores dos templos, como se tratassem de ferozes cães dissuasores.

Tanto os espaços internos como as próprias fachadas tornam-se em locais protegidos do mundo profano envolvente, reportando passagens bíblicas inclusivamente do Antigo Testamento (Sal.84:11): "Vale mais passar um dia nos Teus átrios, do que mil fora deles. Antes quero ficar à porta da casa do meu Deus do que habitar nas tendas dos maus".

A mesma lógica é replicada em certos espaços internos, particularmente em claustros, como o de Alcobaça.

Aqui, o jardim quadrangular reinventa a combinação entre o orgânico e verdejante Éden original e a futura Jerusalém Celeste, de planta rigorosamente quadrada (Ap.21:16).

Nas entradas internas para esse jardim alcobacense observa-se, nos respectivos capitéis, a existência de criaturas do bestiário fabuloso, que equivalem às gárgulas e outros seres que tradicionalmente guardam os templos principais.

[2] Note-se em paralelo que, na arte da pintura, não é raro que esses "demónios" ao serviço da Igreja aludam ainda aos inquisidores, numa subtil mas efectiva denúncia da repressão imposta aos livres-pensadores.

[3] O dragão dos Avis (e dos Bragança) revela-se um tema que merece tratamento mais aprofundado e autonomizado.

De tudo isto conclui-se portanto que tais seres devem ser interpretados em planos sobrepostos: o mal que é expulso dos templos; as omnipresentes tentações; a submissão e domesticação de diabos, agora empregues na protecção do próprio espaço sagrado.

Numa perspectiva geral, destaca-se aqui a regra da versatilidade de soluções, verificando-se mesmo que alguns templos apresentam uma ostensiva assimetria das grandes torres que ladeiam as respectivas entradas principais.

Isso é bem visível na Catedral de Chartres, onde se aproveitou o carácter compósito do monumento para se distinguir as torres e anunciar a chegada de um tempo novo, mais optimista e que já atribuía crescente peso ao homem individual e respectivo livre-arbítrio.

Ao criar-se uma torre "fraca" e outra "forte", reforçava-se em simultâneo quer a ideia de permanente escolha entre o bem e o mal (+ ↔ -), quer o conceito de evolução de um estado inferior para outro superior (+ ← -)[4].

Ainda em Chartres, o esforço de progressão é reforçado por um elaborado labirinto no chão da entrada, constituindo mais um exemplo da variedade de opções simbólicas que se entrelaçam numa lógica comum.

Um outro edifício particularmente interessante será o Mosteiro dos Jerónimos, então mais ribeirinho do que se verifica na actualidade, e que abençoava as naus que partiam, mas também as purificava aquando do regresso, expurgando-lhes os paganismos e heresias de terras distantes.

Em sumário, estes templos constituem verdadeiros laboratórios polissémicos, onde os significados se relacionam de modo sucessivo e coerente, em vários casos fazendo já a ponte para a arte humanista e renascentista, a qual poderá ter rejeitado muitas das formas góticas, mas não os seus mecanismos subjacentes.

Neste aspecto, ao simbolizarem as tensões e as possibilidades de elevação de cada indivíduo, as catedrais góticas reportavam grande parte daquilo que Pico della Mirandola sistematizaria no seu *Discurso sobre a dignidade do Homem*, considerado o manifesto do Renascimento.

Disponibilizado para consulta
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[4] Numa outra camada interpretativa, as torres assimétricas simbolizam ainda a dualidade masculino/feminino, reportando uma temática complexa e que estava à margem da teologia oficializada, mas à qual os intelectuais pré-humanistas e humanistas davam particular importância, incluindo dentro do próprio clero.

THE DYNAMIC TREE OF JESSE

PAULO MARTINS OLIVEIRA

A significant example of the interpretative flexibility of old artworks is the Tree of Jesse, whose overlapped meanings can be decomposed as follows:

1. The fulfilment of Isaiah's prophecy (Isa.11:1-2), "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him [the future Messiah, who would come to be Jesus]…"

2. Christ presented as a royal figure, descending from King David (the son of Jesse, who in turn is equivalent to St. Joseph).

3. The duality of Christ: His blood family on the one hand (the family tree under Him), and God the Father on the other (the light upon Jesus). See also Psalm 85:11, "Truth sprouts up from the ground, while righteousness looks down from the sky".

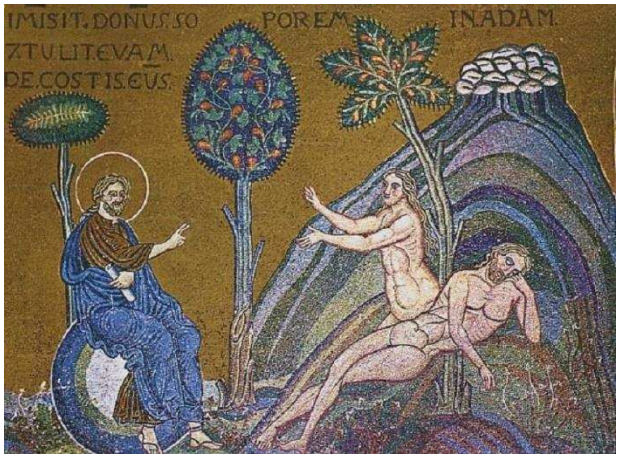
4. The link between the Old Testament (OT) and the New Testament (NT).

5. The evolutive hierarchy between the two Testaments, by means of a sleeping Jesse (OT), still unaware of the enlightening revelation at the top of the Tree (Christ, NT).

6. Jesse as a sleeping Adam (OT, Gen.2:21), from whose side will emerge "Eve". This name means "life; living" (OT, Gen.3:20) ≈ the earthly tree of mankind, to be redeemed by "Jesus", meaning the Saviour (NT, Matt.1:21).

Comparative examples

A)
The Tree of Jesse
Cathedral of Porto
Detail on the sleeping Jesse, as a root.



B)
The creation of Eve from Adam
Cathedral of Monreale, Sicily
(Eve ↔ tree)

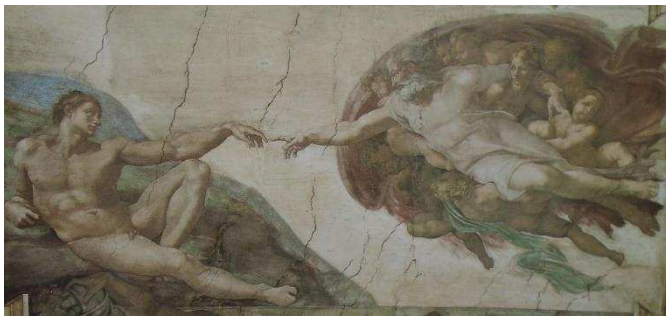
7. In several cases, the Tree of Jesse culminates in the figure of Jesus Child held by the Virgin Mary. In an overlapped layer of meaning, the Virgin actually alludes also to the created Eve, who was the primordial earthly, life-giving tree of mankind (in turn emphasized by the infant, who in this layer symbolizes each new generation to come).

8. Jesse as the dead original Adam (OT, Gen.5:5), in contrast to the reborn, immortal new Adam at the top, i.e. Jesus, NT 1Cor.15:22, "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive"; NT 1Cor.15:45-47, "So it is written: the first man Adam [≈below] became a living being; the last Adam [≈above], a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man [Adam] was of the dust of the earth; the second man [Christ] is of heaven".

9. Moreover, in Luke 3:23-28, the evangelist traces back the lineage of Christ to Adam (via David and Jesse). Adam himself is here called "the son of God" (i.e. the first, whereas Jesus is the ultimate, purified and purifying the Tree of Jesse ≈ the Cross[1]).

[1] On the Tree/the Cross, see Anne Simon, *The Cult of St. Khatherine of Alexandria in Late-Medieval Nuremberg* [n.8].

Comparative example[2]



Detail from the Ceiling of the Sistine Chapel
Layer A: the creation and earthly empowerment of the original Adam by God the Father.
Layer B: God the Father and the new Adam (Christ) generating the Holy Spirit.

10. Following this logic, the Virgin at the top of the Tree of Jesse also represents a new, purified Eve ≈ the Virgin Mary overcoming original sin (compare with #7).

11. The miraculous pregnancy of the new immaculate woman (the Virgin Mary) was initially questioned by his suspicious husband Joseph, who only believed her after as revealing dream (Matt.1:19-25). Due to this, sometimes Joseph is depicted sleeping

Comparative example

Detail from *The Altar of Our Lady*
Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

12. Thereby, the Tree of Jesse also symbolizes the revealing dream of St. Joseph about his virgin wife with the expected Saviour of mankind (moreover, compare with #2).

13. Because of these overlappings (Adam/Joseph; Eve/Virgin Mary), the main figures of Jesse (at the bottom of the Tree) and of the Virgin with the Child (at the top) are often much

[2] See *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.107-109, and the paper titled *The Sistine Chapel and the Holy Spirit*.

larger than the intermediate Kings of the Old Testament (the successors of Jesse, starting with David and progressing up towards Jesus).

14. However, in some cases even these Kings played alternative roles in superimposed narratives, as seen for instance in the Cathedral of Porto:

The larger main figures connect directly in accordance with the different layers of meaning (see all previous points).

Superimposed meanings of the 13 intermediate smaller figures:

A) Kings of the Old Testament, representing the progression towards Jesus;

B) 13 figures alternatively representing an adult Christ (immediately below the great Virgin) along with his 12 apostles (John, James, Peter and Judas are easily identifiable). This artifice elegantly emphasizes the link between the two Testaments.

Concluding, the Tree of Jesse must be considered as being made of different but relatable meanings, following principles of ingenuity and economy.

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THE ANDROGYNOUS JOHN AND CHRIST'S DUALITY

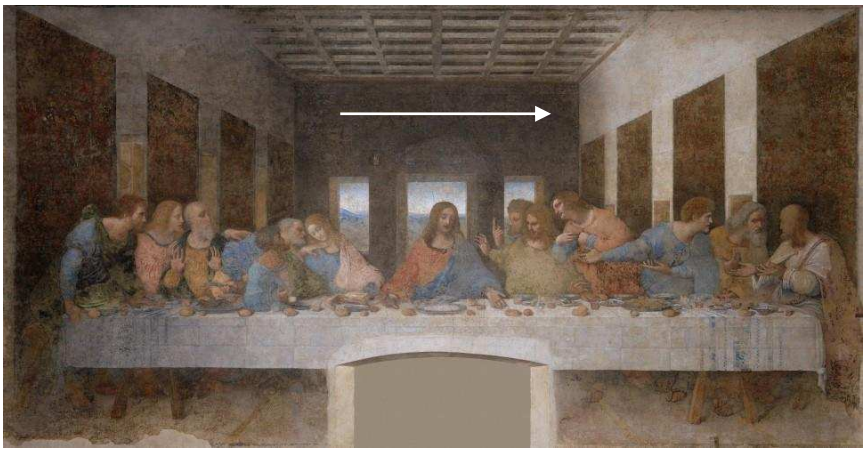
PAULO MARTINS OLIVEIRA

The figure of John the Apostle was used by several old masters to design typical composite, androgynous characters, which symbolize the ones Jesus loved the most and, ultimately, Christ's own duality (in accordance with humanist principles).

As presented elsewhere[1], the controversial depiction of John in Leonardo's *Last Supper* is actually a typical composite character, designed to address the earthly life that Jesus courageously abdicated in order to embrace His higher but tragic mission, so that He could enlighten the world.

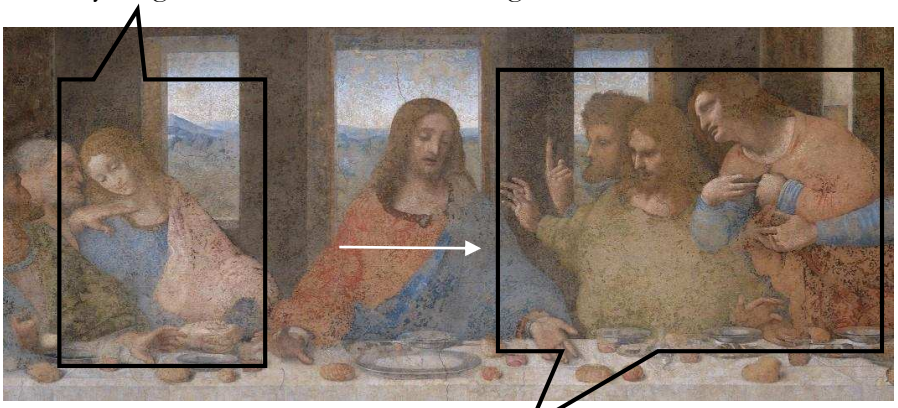
Leonardo da Vinci, *The Last Supper*.

Overall perspective: from earthly carnal penumbra towards eternal divine light (incorporating Christianized Platonic concepts (Allegory of the Cave, etc.)[2].



On closer perspective: from Christ's earthly ties towards His sacrificial mission.

In addition to John (Christ's real favourite disciple, Jn.20:2, 20-24), this androgynous character also represents both the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene, i.e. the three main figures to attend the Crucifixion.



The apostle James (John's brother) plays the role of a crucified Jesus between the repentant and the unrepentant thieves (Philip and Thomas)[3].

It is to be noted that other masters of that time also created ambiguous apostles "John", in order to overlay different meanings.

Two examples (early 16th century)

1

John in the *Belém Monstrance*, by Gil Vicente. Superimposed reading: in the circle of the apostles, the very feminine John also represents both the Virgin and Magdalene[4].

2

Detail of John in the *Last Supper* modelled by Hodart. Superimposed reading: John also represents Magdalene, who was traditionally regarded as "the apostle of the apostle", i.e. a subsidiary, auxiliary disciple (more specifically a link between Christ and the main male apostles, Mk.16:9-11; Jn.20:17-18)[5].

However, the inclusion of Magdalene was also a pretext for freethinking artists to speculate surreptitiously on the mysterious years before Christ's own baptism.

In this way, they proposed a more human and closer Jesus, emphasizing His courage to leave an easy common life and follow instead a sacrificial path which eventually will lead Him to the cross.

Two of many examples in which this issue is subtly overlapped.

1

Correggio, *Noli Me Tangere*[6].

2

Titian, *Venus and Adonis*[7].

Although not officially accepted, this idea was not necessarily contrary to the actual Scriptures (which were silent on such an issue), nor affronted the institutional logic of the Church itself, for its own members had renounced normal family lives to follow a spiritual, religious calling.

It is even likely that more liberal, humanist high clergymen were being seduced by that concept, not least because the Holy See was an heterogeneous world by itself, of which artists were an important part (sometimes as accomplices). Nonetheless, the idea of a fallible and somehow hesitating Jesus (≈the Prodigal Son)[8] was still considered potentially dangerous, since it was hardly explicable to the ignorant masses, besides weakening the powerful image of Christ before Islam and its own Prophet.

Thus, that elegant humanist view remained hidden throughout several ingenious artworks, including in the Sistine Chapel[9].

Layer 1 (official): the consummated Christ, with the Virgin.
Layer 2 (underlying): the earlier Jesus, with Magdalene.

In this same context, the androgynous figure of John was also used to surreptitiously refer to the progressing duality of Christ, as seen, for instance, in the *Last Supper* painted by Daniele Crespi[10].

Official meaning: the Messiah as a fully committed spiritual leader (with John and the other apostles).

Underlying meaning: the earlier marital Jesus (with Magdalene and friends)[11].

As seen above, "John", i.e. Magdalene, was depicted sleeping, which was actually a common artifice to mean that she not yet realized Christ's calling (however her own enlightenment would eventually occur).

Sometimes, Jesus Himself is also depicted sleeping, which symbolizes His supposed previous mundane life (i.e. the conjecture on the silent years before His baptism).

Example by Francisco Henriques, *Jesus praying at Gethsemane*.

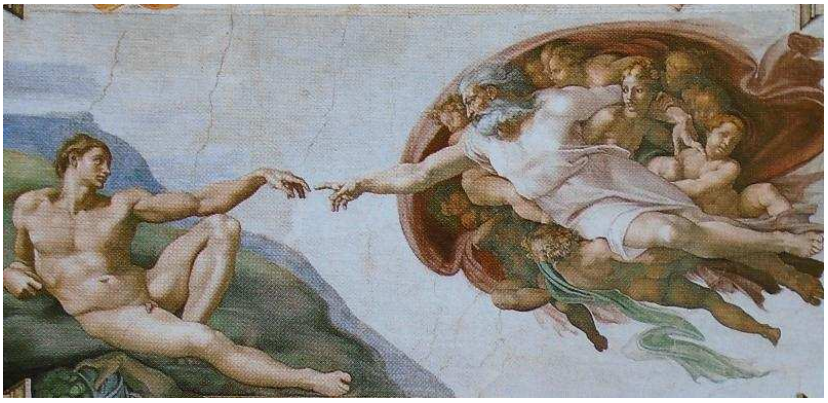
Superimposed reading: the brothers John and James form a pair, symbolizing the sleeping (≈unaware, earthly) Magdalene and Jesus. Farther up, the evolved and now committed Jesus (actually an awakened duplication of the supposed James) prepares Himself to face His tragic fate[12].

Comparative example

Vision of a Knight, by Raphael. Superimposed reading: "Jesus" between the earthly love and the divine sacrificial duty. This image also recalls the Crucifixion (Christ between the criminals), as well as the Tree of Jesse (Christ as a new root → the New Testament)[13].

Related examples

Venus and Mars, by Botticelli. Superimposed reading: the earlier Jesus kept away from His duty[14].



The Creation of Adam, by Michelangelo. Superimposed reading: the "New Adam" (i.e. Christ) "waking up" and performing His duty by generating the Holy Spirit, along with God the Father[15].

As for the unaware Magdalene, and despite her individual, selfish hopes and dreams, freethinking artists were actually sympathetic to her, precisely because she best represents the fallible, delusional dimension of every single human being, including Jesus Himself, as remarked by Erasmus in his liberating *Praise of Folly* [original ed.1511, quoted English ed. 1668]: "And Christ himself, that he might the better relieve this folly, being the wisdom of the Father, yet in some manner became a fool when taken upon him the nature of man, he was found in shape as a man; as in like manner he was made sin that he might heal sinners".

Thus instead of considering Christ just an almighty deity and a miracle maker, humanists also saw Him as someone struggling with Himself, and therefore imitable in some degree by men and women in general.

Finally, it should be noted that humanist painters were not just delivering somewhat repetitive Annunciations, Crucifixions and Baptisms in the Jordan. Much more importantly, they were using these kinds of scenes to creatively address human nature itself, which was oscillating between good and wrong ways (≈the two crucified thieves, etc.)[16].

This helps understand why Leonardo, in his *Treatise*, placed the art of painting at the very top of all disciplines of knowledge.

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NOTES

[1] See *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.35-70, and *Leonardo's Last Supper and the three layers*.
[2] The lighting contrast is clearer in the better-preserved copies of Tongerlo and of the Royal Academy, both from the 16th century.
[3] There are reasons explaining why Philip and Thomas were chosen for those roles. See the book and the paper mentioned in the first endnote.
[4] For more on this particularly elaborate artwork, see *As camadas simbólicas da Custódia de Belém*.
[5] In 1988 Pope John Paul II (*Mulieris Dignitatem*) officially recognized Mary Magdalene as the apostle of the apostles, ratifying an ancient, medieval tradition.
[6] Several other paintings on the same subject also hide similar ideas (e.g. *Noli Me Tangere* by Fra Angelico, in which the entrance of the tomb also represents an ordinary home, abandoned by Christ).
[7] Adonis had left Venus/Aphrodite to follow a tragic path. In fact, mythological characters were often used to refer to Christian subjects (on this issue, see *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.171-180).
[8] On this matter, see *A Bênção de Rafael*, p.3.
[9] Check *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.111-119, 143-149.
[10] For more on this painting, see *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.139-141.
[11] Other paintings are relatively more obvious when dealing with a "mundane supper". See for instance *The Prodigal Son*, by Gerrit van Honthorst, in which the yet allegorical, deviated Jesus is accompanied only by six friends (the traditional number of imperfection: only half of the apostles and of the old tribes of Israel, besides other reasons).
[12] As for Peter, his own positioning intends to criticize the papacy, whose prestige was severely damaged during the pontificate of Alexander VI (Rodrigo Borgia). On those scandals see, for instance, *Crónica de D. Manuel I*, by Damião de Góis (I:XXXIII).
[13] On this painting, see *Separata 1*, pp.46-47, 56; on the Tree of Jesse, see *The dynamic Tree of Jesse*; on the merging of religious scenes, see *The composite episodes in Christian Art*.
[14] See *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.97-99; and *Separata 1*, pp.46-47.
[15] Check *Leonardo x Michelangelo*, pp.101-109, as well as the paper *The Sistine Ceiling and the Holy Spirit*.
[16] The two crucified thieves represent the free will of each individual, including Christ's own duality and struggling conscience (e.g. *The Crucifixion* painted by Bramantino). See *The dual Christ and the criminals*.

THE TRANSMUTABLE JESUS AND MAGDALENE

PAULO MARTINS OLIVEIRA

Freethinking artists designed various devices to speculate surreptitiously on the silent years of Christ's own life, prior to His baptism.

Thus, by proposing an earlier marital Jesus, several humanist painters actually emphasized His sacrifice on the cross, as well as called for a closer and more imitable Messiah[1].

In this context, the dynamic figures of Jesus and Magdalene also symbolize a "New Adam" and a "New Eve", i.e. the redemption of mankind (the coherence between the Old and the New Testament).

Example analysed herein: *The Crucifixion*, Corrado Giaquinto (P.N. Mafra)

• Official layer: The crucified Jesus, accompanied by John the Apostle, Mary Magdalene and a young (≈virginal) Virgin Mary.

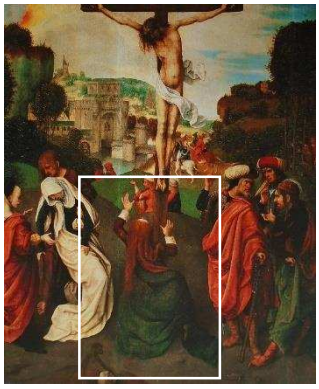
• Superimposed reading:

1. The painting has a right-to-left sequence (from the observer's perspective), or rather left-right from the perspective of the characters themselves.

2. Such a sequence begins with the supposed "John", who actually represents the earlier mundane Jesus being enlightened (by a beam of divine light), and accepting His tragic but necessary fate.

3. Seeing herself still in the shade, Magdalene does not yet understand the fateful choice and mission of Jesus, now on the cross. Most likely, her large handkerchief implies a sexual connotation, regarding the previous (≈lower, carnal) dimension of Christ Himself.

Comparative example: *The Crucifixion*, Master of the Virgo inter Virgines



The desperate, abandoned Magdalene also symbolizes a tempting "Eve" (the sinuous serpent of temptation, i.e. the carnal lower dimension of Christ, emphasized by the adamic monkey).

4. Completing the sequence of Giaquinto's painting, the anachronistic young Virgin Mary actually symbolizes an enlightened Magdalene, who now sadly accepts and understands His higher mission.

Comparative example: *Penitent Magdalene*, Michel Dorigny (engraving).

5. Lastly, still on Giaquinto's picture, the mentioned female and male composite figures at the extremes represent the new, redeemed Eve and Adam, while, at the centre of the composition, the cross itself also signifies the earlier tree of temptation (the despondent, punished "Eve" and "Adam", Gen.3:6, alpha, Old Testament), as well as the culminating life-giving Tree of Life (Rev.22:19, omega, New Testament), i.e. the crucified Messiah overcoming His own fallible side (assuming Himself as the highest example for mankind to imitate, in order to return to the good graces of God).

In conclusion, old artworks must be read in their different layers of meaning, since they were, above all, true intellectual masterpieces.

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[1] On this matter, see *The Androgynous John and Christ's duality*, as well as the earlier contributions titled *The dual Christ and the criminals*, and *Leonardo x Michelangelo*.